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SUBJECT: MINISTER MARAFA: PRESIDENT BIYA NEVER LIKED ELECAM

REF: YAOUNDE 24

Classified By: Ambassador Janet E. Garvey for reasons 1.4 (d) and (e)

¶1. (C) Summary: The Ambassador had dinner on January 10 with Minister of Territorial Administration and Decentralization Marafa Hamidou Yaya, a longtime political insider whose ministry used to oversee the Organization of Elections Cameroon (ONEL), the predecessor to Elections Cameroon (ELECAM). Marafa confirmed that President Biya dislikes ELECAM and he thought Biya would run again in 2011. The army was increasingly jealous of the Rapid Intervention Battalion. Cameroon's relations with Equatorial Guinea were deteriorating, according to Marafa. End summary.

ELECAM

¶2. (C) President Biya never liked ELECAM but was forced to accept it by the Commonwealth, according to Minister Marafa. As a result, ELECAM never had a champion in the government (Note: Marafa had told us repeatedly that he opposed ELECAM because of its additional cost and because he thought ONEL was better able to run elections. End note.) Marafa claimed he had told Biya that the names he had in mind for ELECAM would not be well received, "but he didn't listen" and was ill served by his close advisors. Marafa was very concerned that ELECAM as currently configured is set up to fail.

The Future

¶3. (C) Marafa thought Biya would likely run for president again in 2011 and opined that his wife Chantal and a circle of ambitious advisors are negatively influencing the President's plans. He was concerned about the possibility of chaos in a post-Biya period, saying that the north (where he is from) will not support Biya insiders after the President is gone. He cautioned that the regular army is increasingly jealous of the perks and funding of the elite Rapid Intervention Battalion (BIR).

Equatorial Guinea

¶4. (SBU) Marafa has been involved in negotiating with the government of Equatorial Guinea (EG) and confirmed that Cameroon's relations with EG are worsening. The latest strain is the detention of EG military in Cameroon and their exchange for Cameroonian fishermen detained by the EG government.

Comment

¶5. (C) Marafa is one of the more candid and critical

ministers in the government, whose longtime personal loyalty to Biya does not appear to extend to other elements of the Biya regime. Marafa is clearly very frustrated by the slow pace of decisionmaking in the country and gives the impression he would like to get out of government, mentioning repeatedly his desire to make money (presumably by leaving government). His description of Biya's attitude toward ELECAM is consistent with what we heard from the ruling party Secretary General (reftel) and does not bode well for the organization.

GARVEY